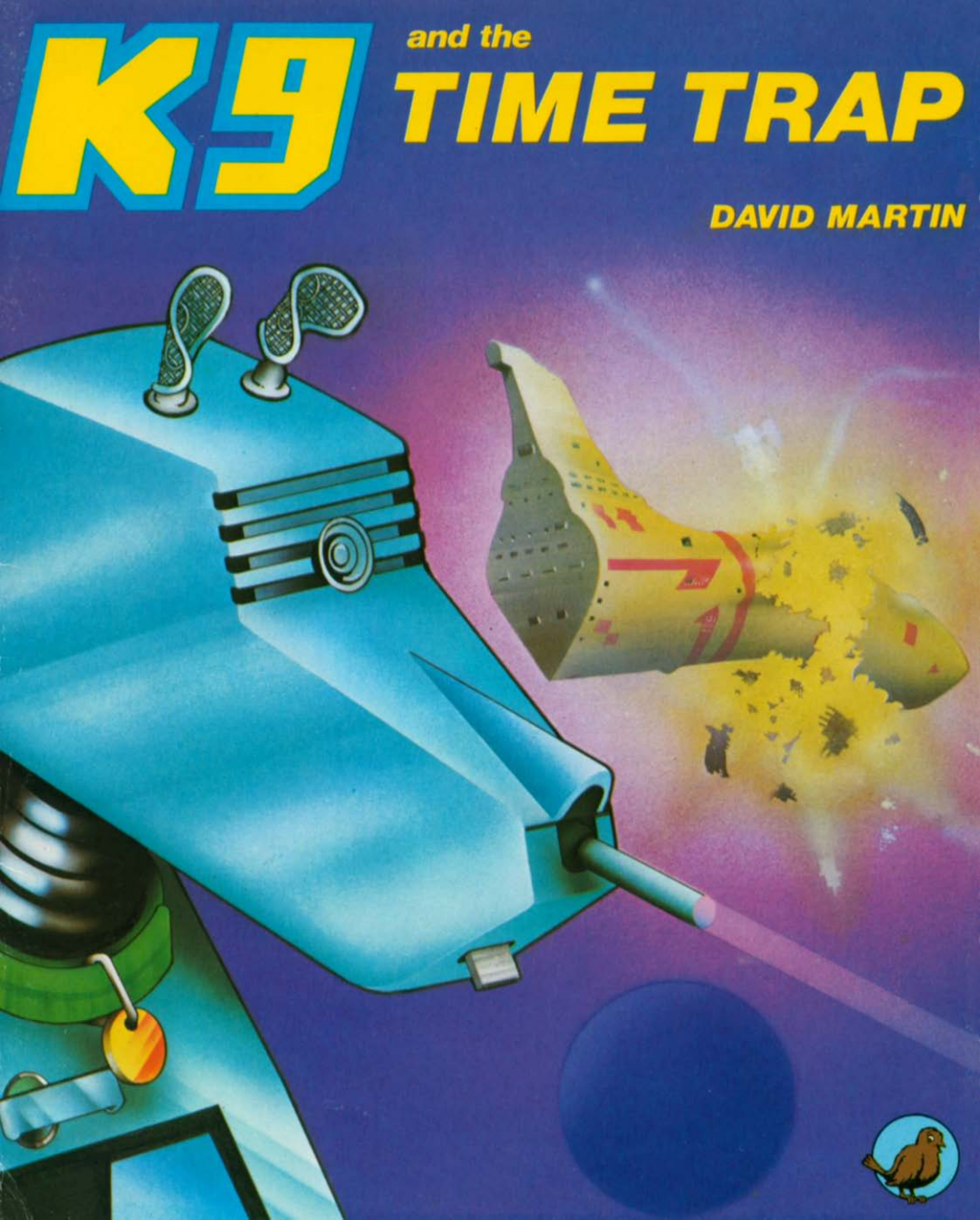
K9 and the TIME TRAP

DAVID MARTIN



FROM: Gallifrey Databank
TO: Gallifrey High Command

CLASSIFICATION: Most Secret

SUBJECT: K9
HISTORY: Robot dog designed and first constructed by a certain Professor Marius (type: Earth, male) in year 5000 A.D. Built as a mobile computer unit and pet replacement. Later modified by Time Lord Theta Sigma (also known as 'The Doctor') to improve performance.

POTENTIAL USE: Now capable of independent missions in situations classed as too dangerous for Time Lord intervention.

EQUIPMENT: Sophisticated polysensory tracking systems. Self-energising drive and decision-making capability. Multi-phase photon-blaster infinitely variable from 'immobilisation' to 'dematerialisation'.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: Spacecraft K-NEL. Ion rocket motors (3) only. No time-travel facility. Operated as extension of K9's central computer. No armaments. Shape, smooth triangular block. Colour, white. Speed: UNDISCLOSED.

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British Broadcasting Corporation

K9

and the

TIME TRAP

DAVID MARTIN

'What we have here,' said the burly Rigelian fleet commander, 'is a total impossibility.'

'An impossibility,' observed K9, 'is usually something a humanoid mind cannot understand.'

'Listen, you mechanical bloodhound,' said the commander bluntly, 'this is a total impossibility. The entire Rigelian Seventh Fleet can't just disappear. Apart from anything else it's against orders. So you do what you are hired to do — go find me a fleet!'

K9 sped off on his mission. At just under the speed of light, K-NEL took off across the deep starless gulf between the galaxies. Here there was nothing, not even a stray hydrogen atom, to use as fuel — and K9 had plenty of time to consider his mission. On his magnetic pads he carried a Rigelian battle cruiser which he would use as bait to attract the mysterious enemy — but first he had to find the trap . . .

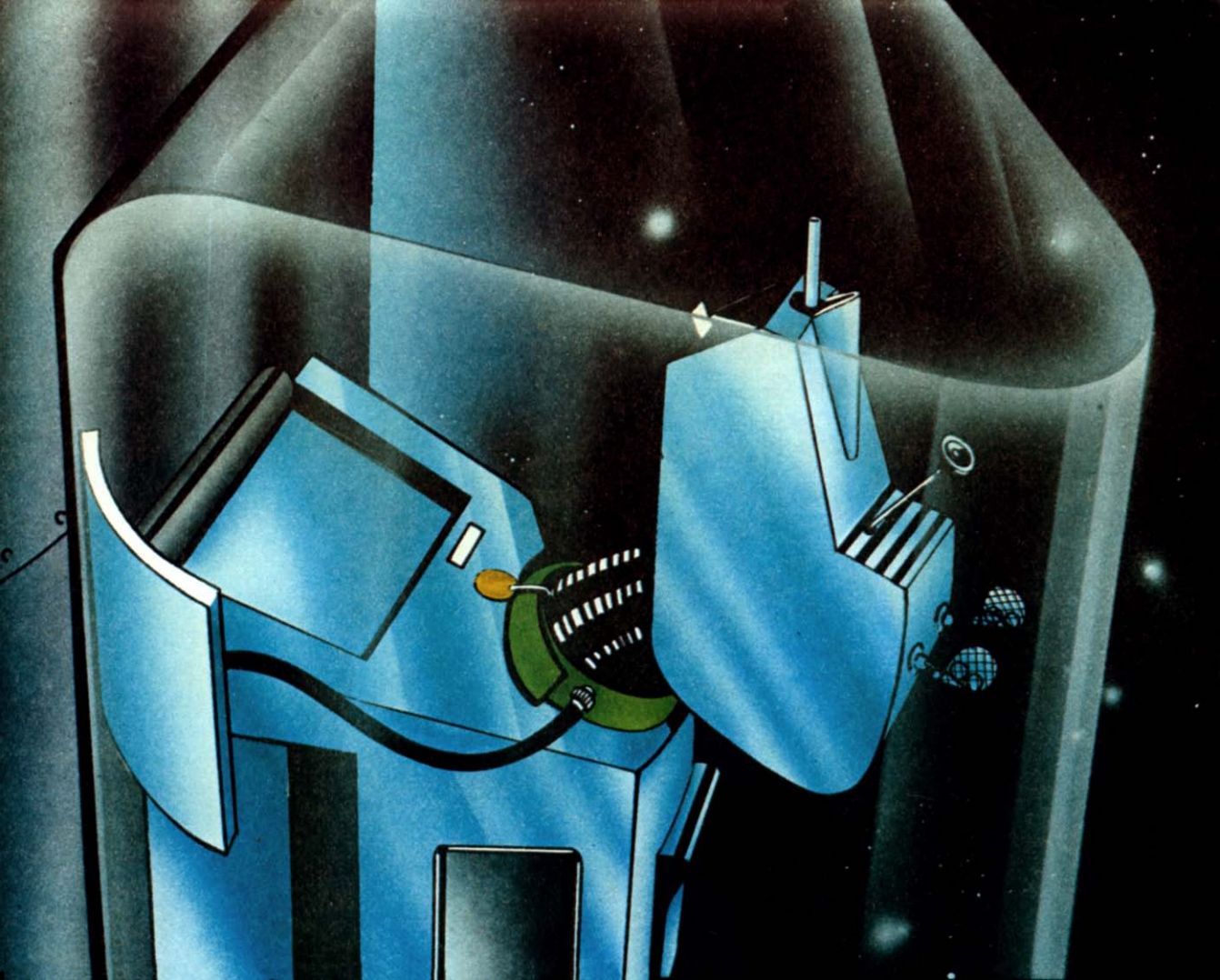
H-NEL

Weeks later by Standard Earth Time, K9 was still on patrol. So far he found nothing. He felt less like a 'mechanical bloodhound' than ever.

He knew that the Rigelians were not the first people to lose their fleet. 'Vanishments', as they were called, had been happening since space travel had first begun. True, there had been a rapid increase in the numbers of disappearances recently, but as K9 liked to observe, 'These things happen in space.'

He climbed to avoid the gas cloud ahead.

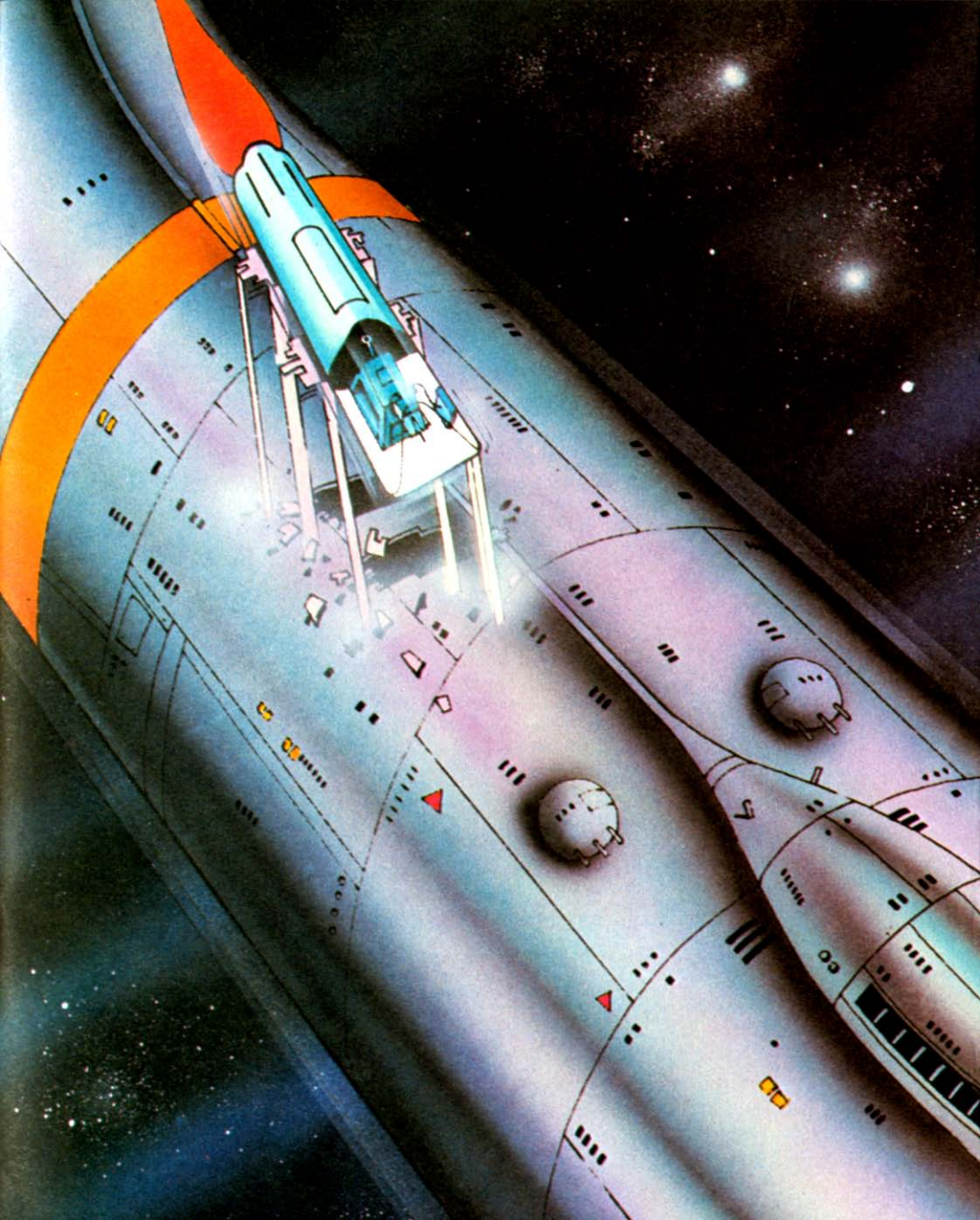
And the gas cloud climbed after him . . .



All K9's sensors went haywire. For a split second he was taken completely by surprise.

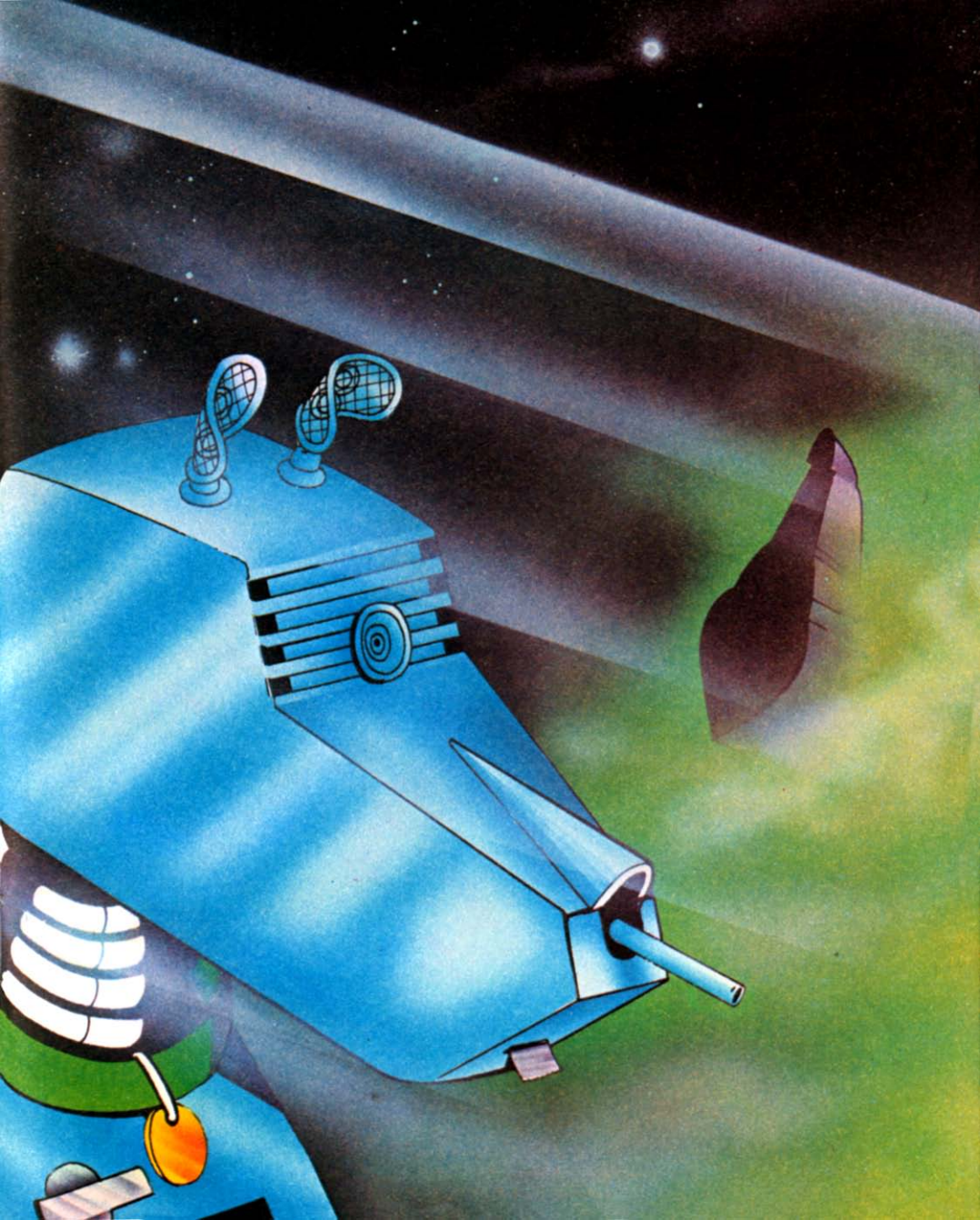
Then, as he tried to accelerate out of the cloud, he felt a tremendous gravity drag, as though the battle cruiser had suddenly grown much heavier. There was a sound of crashing, tearing metal — and instantly K9 flew up like a cork out of the gas cloud.

Apart from one or two small fragments still sticking to K-NEL's magnetic pads, the Rigelian battle cruiser had completely disappeared.



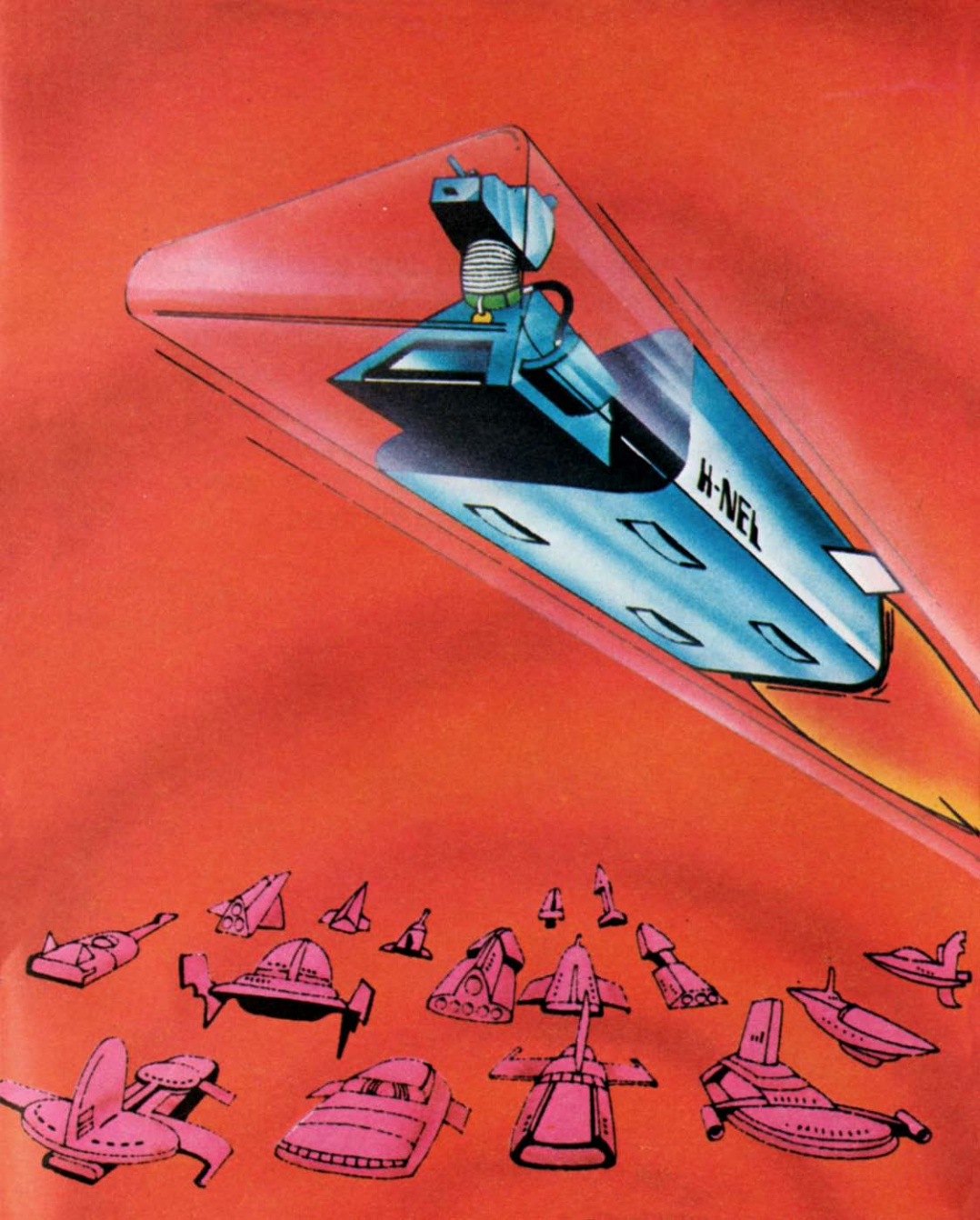
K9 watched the gas cloud grow smaller. Some force was sucking it in — and the Rigelian battle cruiser with it. But where were they going? There were no black holes or anti-matter pockets in this sector.

If he delayed any longer, the gas cloud would be gone. As the last wisp disappeared, K9 switched to full boost and drove his small white craft at maximum power into the cloud.

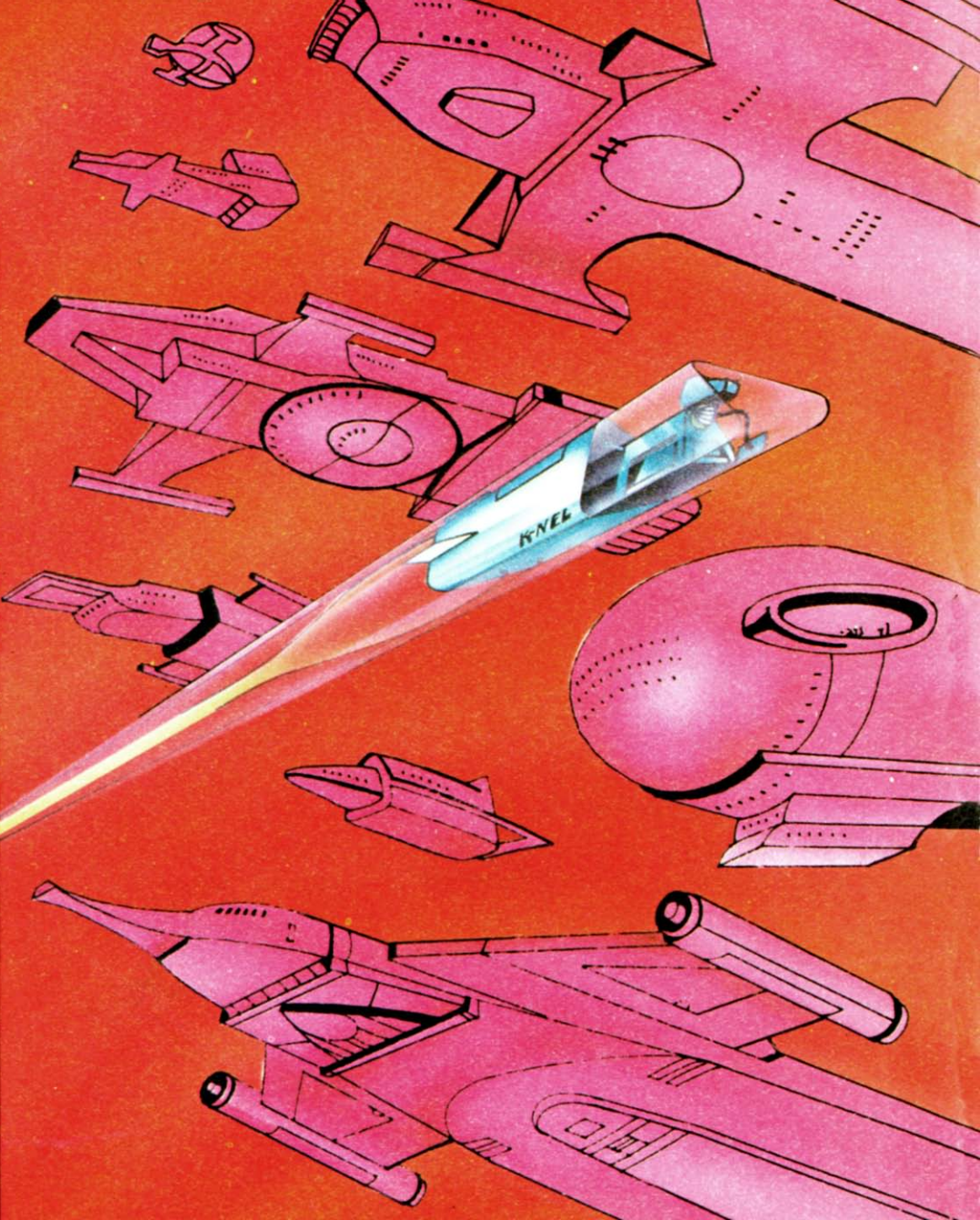


Inside, all was red. It was like hanging inside a giant crimson hot-air balloon. K9 checked his sensors. Nothing seemed to be wrong — except that no time had passed since the start of his dive . . . So that was it! He was in a time trap. As far as he knew only Time Lords knew how to meddle with time . . .

Far below lay something even more amazing — rank upon rank of starships and freighters from every corner of the universe.


H-NEL

Thousands of craft, from tiny satellites to enormous space stations, were all neatly stacked one above the other in zero-gravity blocks as high as skyscrapers. K9 cruised between the shining towers of this astonishing metal city. It was an immense museum of space exploration, with craft from every civilisation ever to have leapt the stars.


KNEL

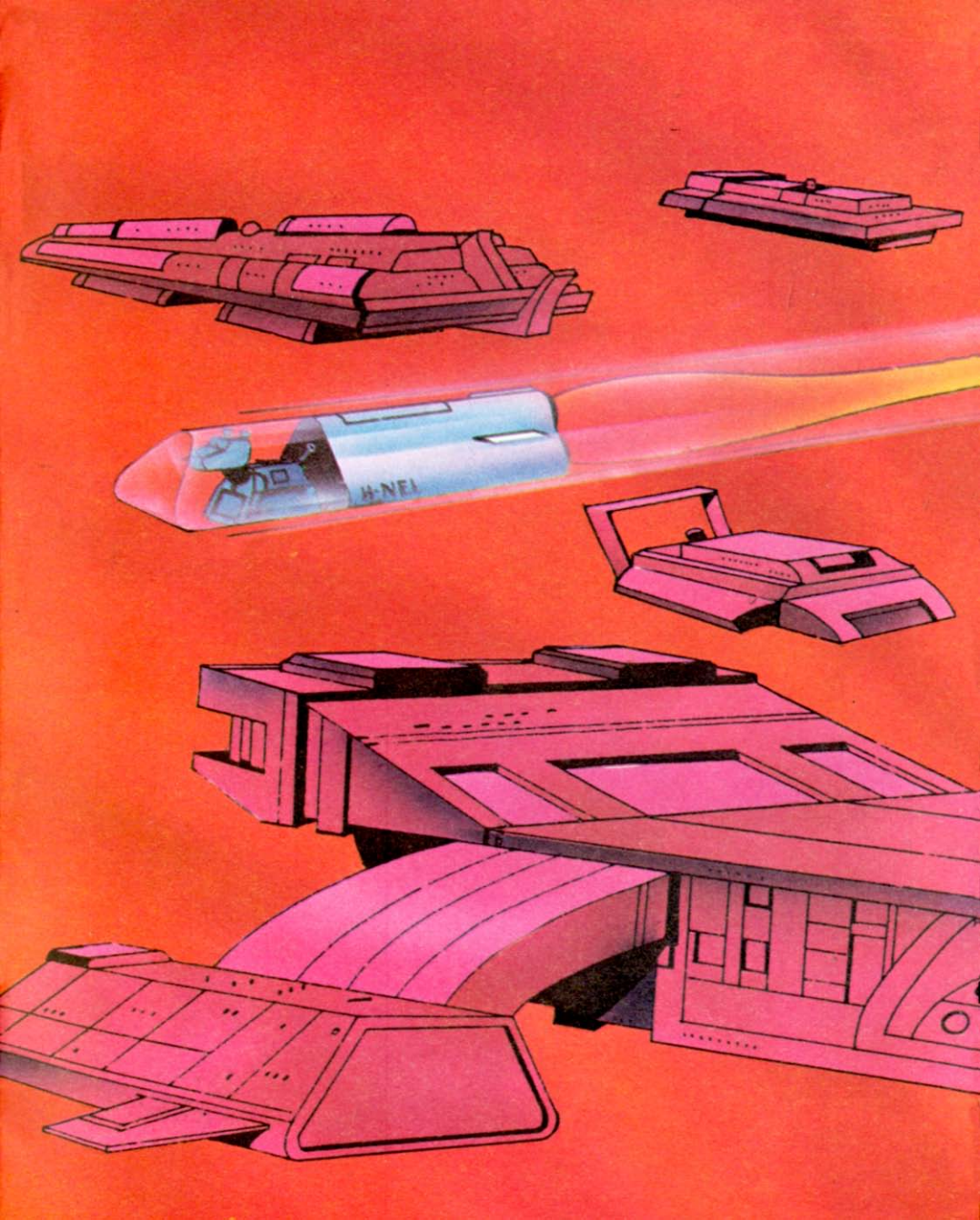
'Welcome to my cosmic junkyard, little metal hound.' The deep voice seemed to come from everywhere at once, echoing around the towers of the starships. 'Do not be afraid.'

'Fear,' said K9 promptly, 'has not been built into my circuitry.'

'I know,' said the deep voice. 'I have met your master.'

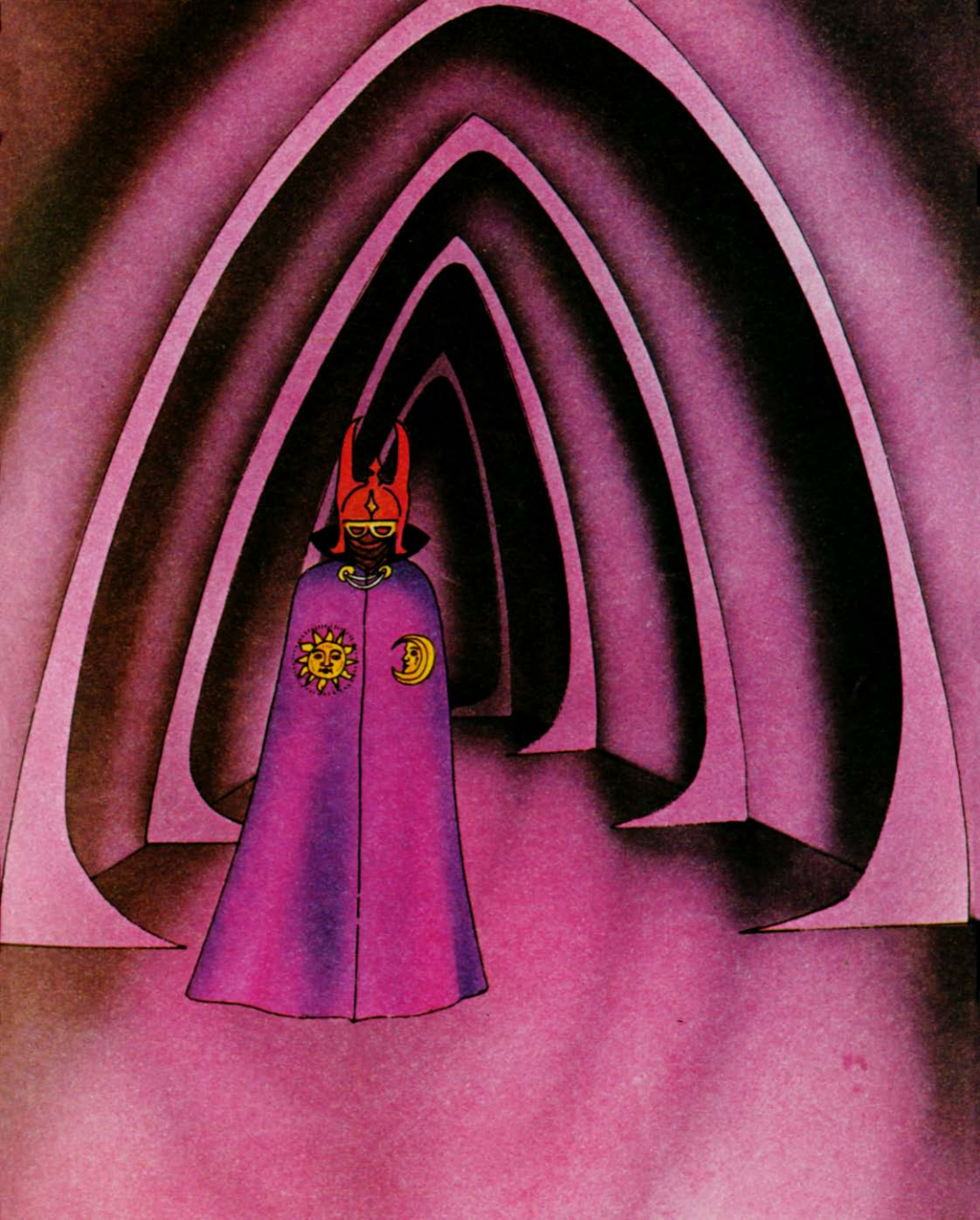
'Who are you?' enquired K9. For a moment there was no answer, and then he felt the controls of the craft being taken over.

'A place has been prepared,' said the voice.



Try as he might K9 could not regain control of his craft. It was landed for him. When he trundled out with his blaster at the ready, he was met by a giant, awesome figure in a purple cloak that hissed as it swept the floor. The figure's head was completely encased in a red helmet and red light shone behind the slit in the vizor. The figure advanced slowly towards him dragging one leg.

'My name is Omegon.'

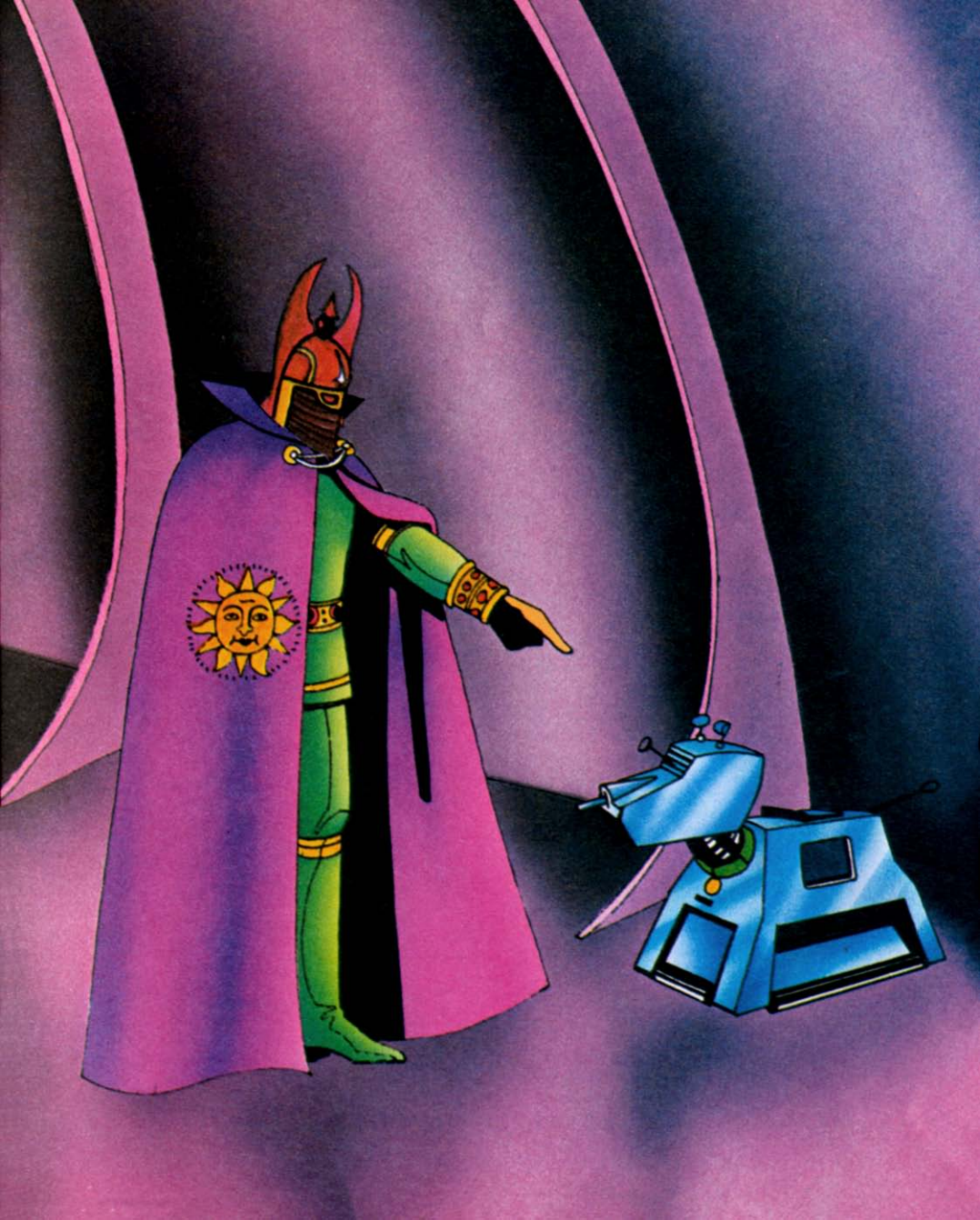


'I am K9. If you come any closer, I shall be forced to dematerialise you.'

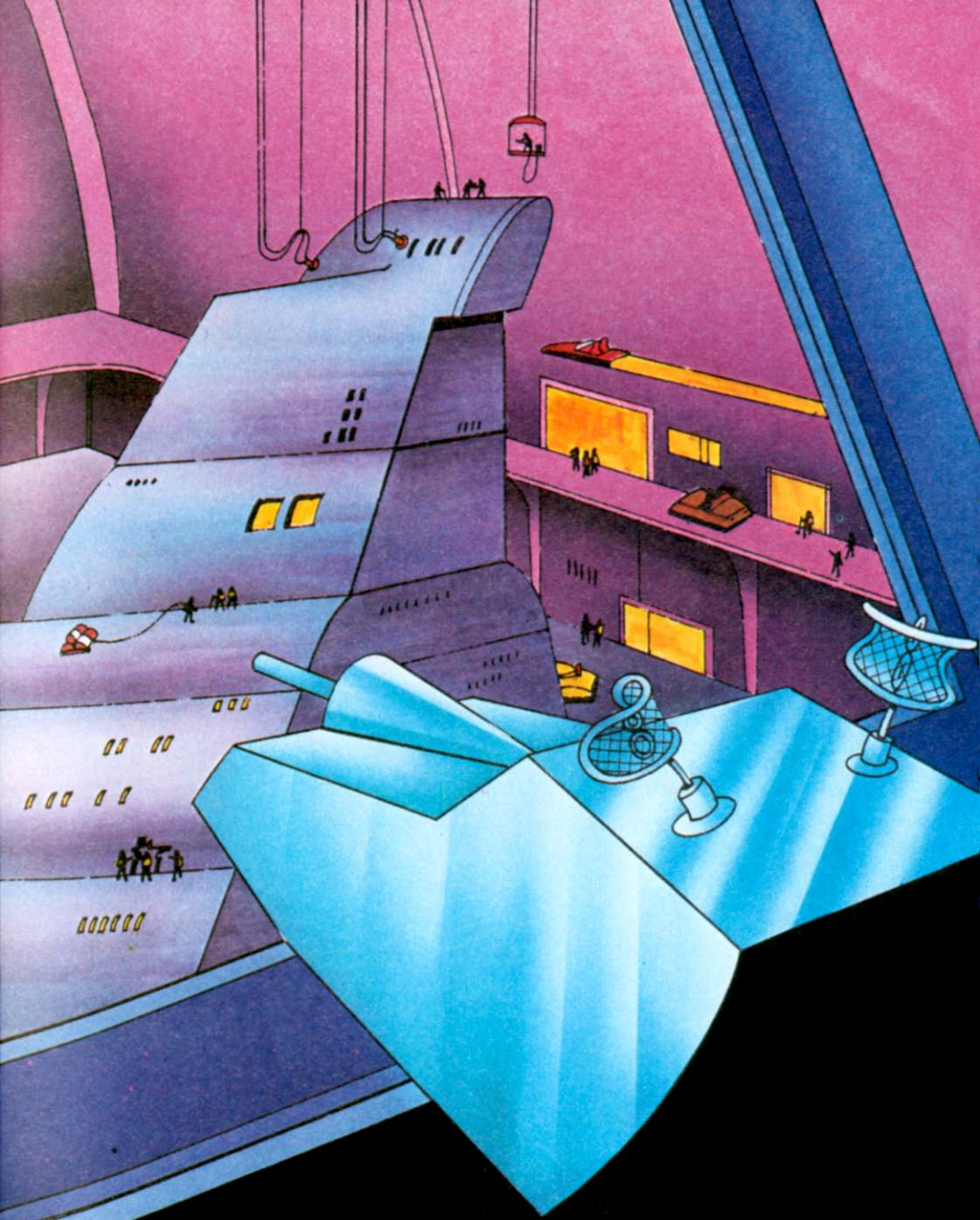
The gaunt figure laughed. 'You? Destroy me, Omegon, whom a thousands suns could not harm? And then what will you do? Put me in your flying doghutch?' The figure drew nearer.

K9 stood his ground, his sensors twitching.

'Listen, hound. I too was once a Time Lord, until I was betrayed . . .' Omegon paused, shaking with anger. 'Come, let me show you my kingdom.'



As they toured the caverns where Omegon's prisoners worked, he told K9 his story. Once, Omegon had been a great engineer. It was he who had created the system that gave the Time Lords time-travel. 'I harnessed the power of a thousand suns for them,' he said. 'They made me emperor — then plotted to destroy me, and marooned me here! They think I am trapped in this crimson bubble of time,' roared Omegon, 'but soon I shall have my revenge!'



Omegon gave the signal for the whole fleet to take off. From the other prisoners K9 learned that Omegon was launching the whole fleet — ten thousand ships at least — in one huge destructive raid on Gallifrey. Countless men would be killed and all the ships destroyed, but nothing mattered to Omegon save his revenge . . .

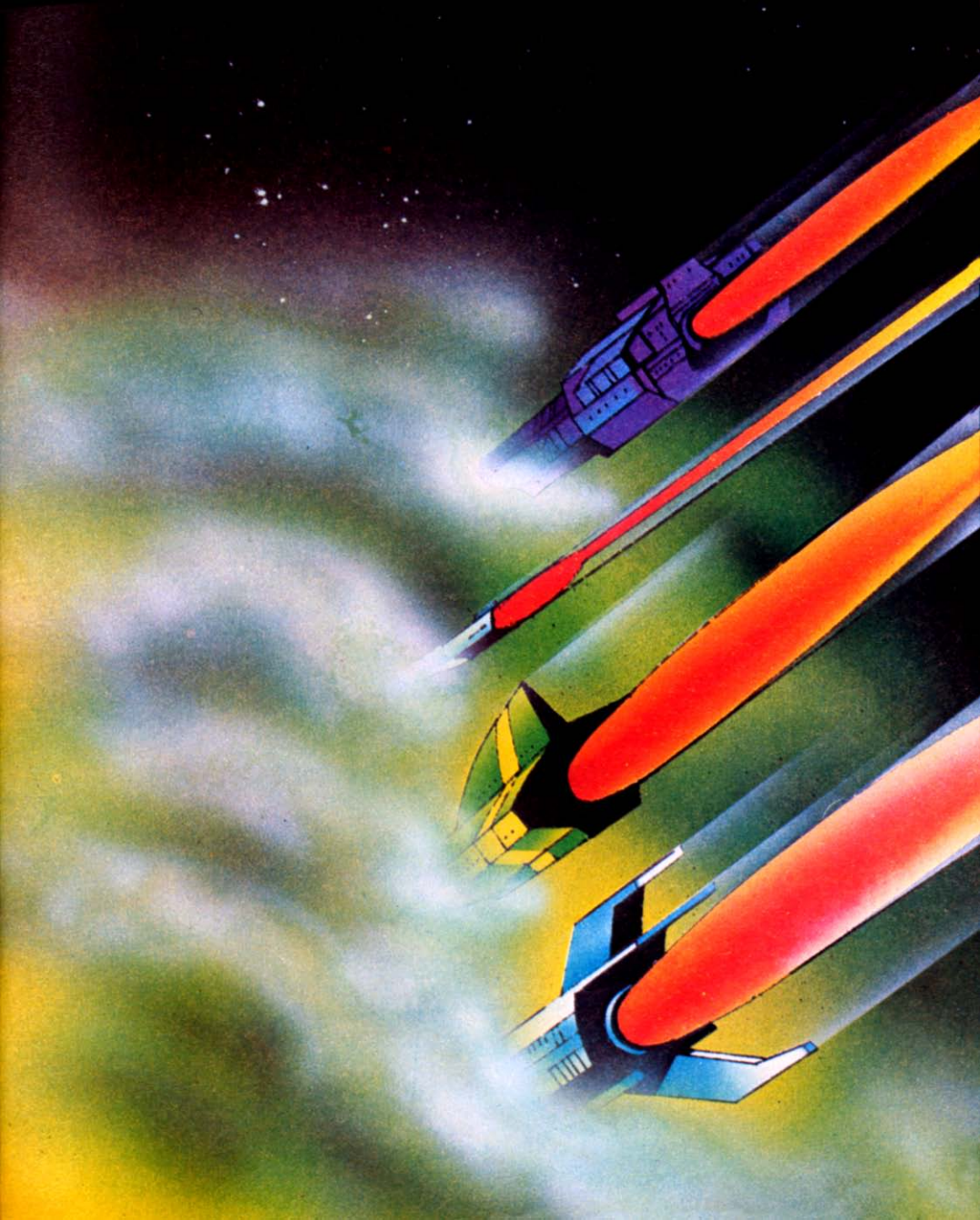
It seemed to K9 that Omegon's plan was perfect. Every single craft was under Omegon's control and linked to his master computer.

The whole fleet moved towards Gallifrey under cover of a gas cloud, completely hidden from any tracking system.

But Omegon, in his eagerness for revenge, had forgotten one thing: K9 was also a computer.

K9 worked frantically to free his craft from Omegon's master control system. Gallifrey was in sight when he finally succeeded.

'Attack!' roared Omegon. 'Destroy!'



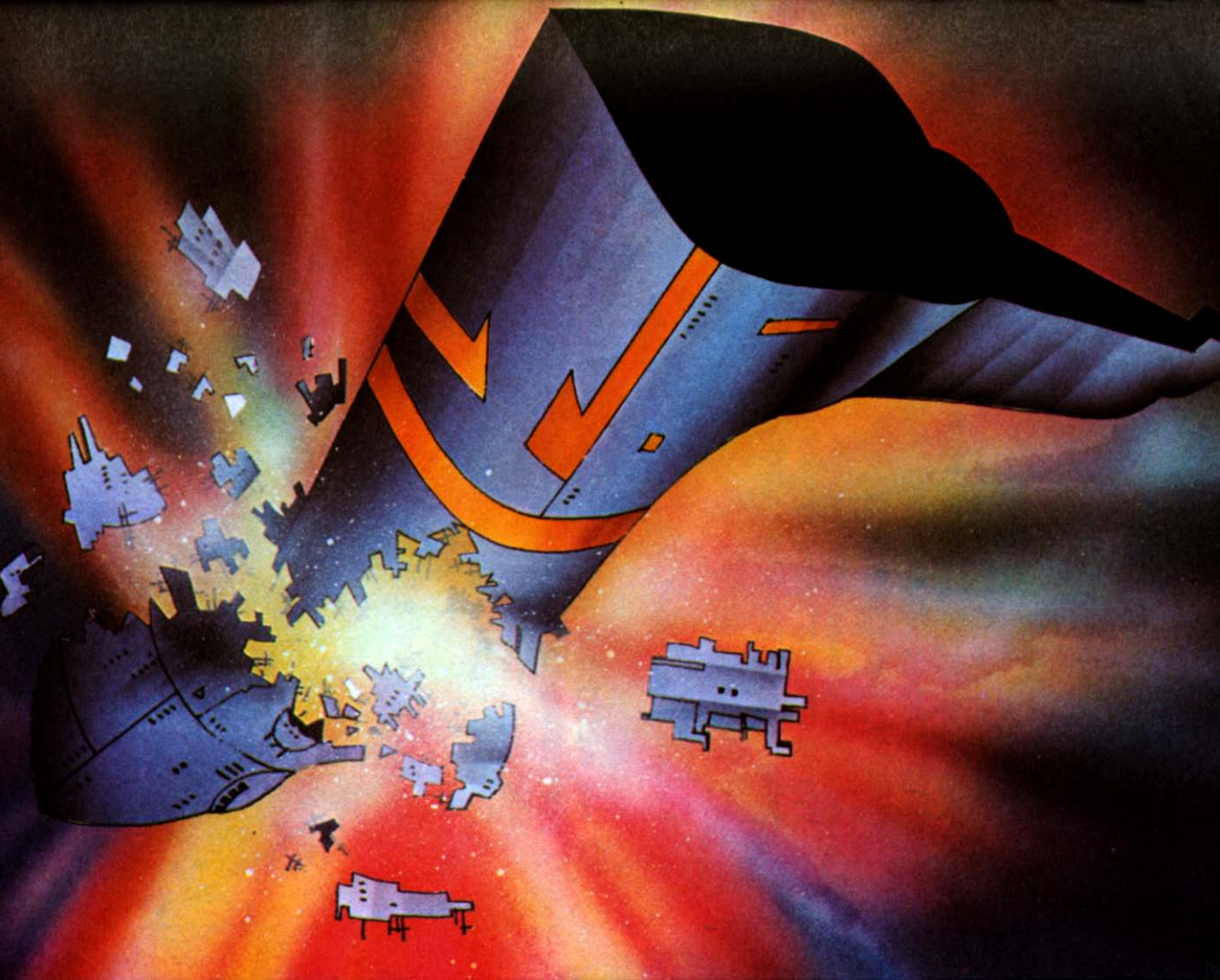
K9 ejected from K-NEL and was picked up by a Rigelian supply vessel. He watched from the bridge as ten thousand starships roared down on Gallifrey.

Then he gave the signal.

The slim white shape of his beloved K-NEL sped like a torpedo straight for the rocket store of Omegon's flagship.

K-NEL had been an excellent craft. But it had to be sacrificed to save life.

It was right on target. The explosion was colossal. Omegon was obliterated.



After reporting to Gallifrey High Command, K9 flew back with the Rigelian fleet. A surprise was waiting for him in the Spaceport.

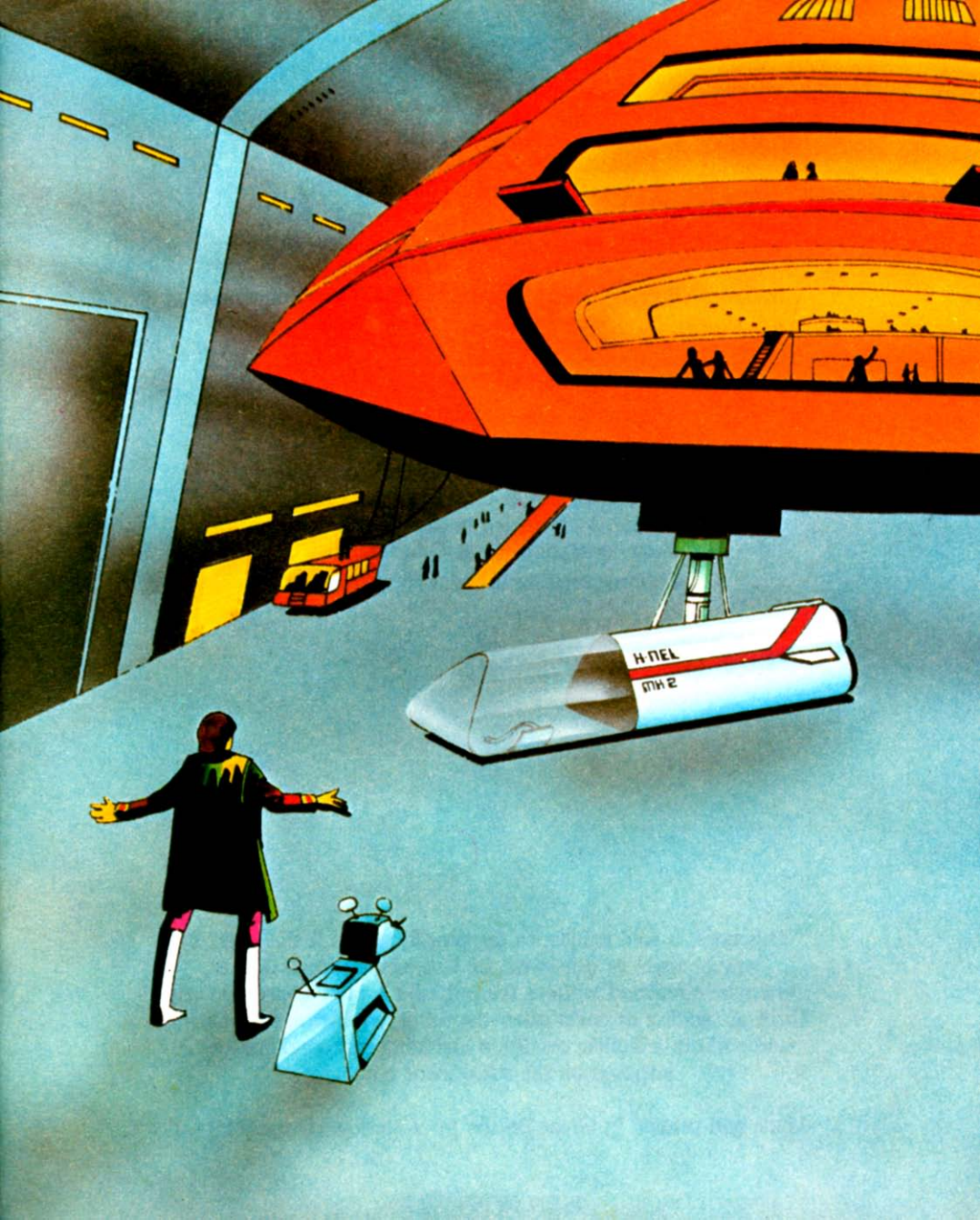
'We've made a few improvements to your original design,' said the Rigelian fleet commander, 'and now she flies like a bird.'

K9 remained silent.

'We would like you to accept K-NEL Mark 2 with our thanks. What do you think?'

'Stripes,' said K9 at last, 'are not improvements.'

But it did fly like a bird.



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THE ADVENTURES OF K9 No. 1

The entire Seventh Fleet has disappeared. The Commander says it is impossible. K9 says that is only because the human mind cannot understand it. At just under the speed of light, he takes off across the deep starless gulf between the galaxies on another dangerous mission. He uses a battlecruiser as his bait — but first he must find the trap ...

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